

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

What is claimed is:

1. (currently amended) A method for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said method comprising:

receiving a print task at a print system component;

receiving user input comprising a cluster printing selection at said print system component, wherein said selection identifies specific printing devices and communicates a specific quantity of printing devices;

combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

creating spool data from said driver-dependent data; ~~and~~

determining portions of said spool data to be distributed to each of said specific printing devices; and

~~dividing and~~ distributing said portions of said spool data among ~~a plurality of said~~ specific printing devices with said print system component, said ~~dividing and~~ distributing comprising concurrent parallel playback of said portions of said spool data ~~to multiple printer drivers,~~ to each of said specific printing devices.

2. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said determining dividing and said distributing comprises job splitting.

3. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said determining dividing and said distributing comprises copy splitting.

4. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 ~~wherein said load balancing~~ comprises obtaining printer capability data from said plurality of printing devices further comprising determining printer capability data and prompting a user for said cluster printing selection, wherein said prompting only allows selection of printing devices with capabilities that match requirements of said print task.

5. (currently amended) The method of claim 4 wherein said printer capability data comprises a rate at which ~~at least one of said plurality of~~ said printing devices prints pages.

6. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said ~~dividing, said distributing and said load balancing~~ determining comprises dividing said print task among said ~~plurality of~~ specific printing devices according to the speed of each of said specific printing devices.

7. (original) The method of claim 1 further comprising querying at least one printing device to determine at least one of its capabilities.

8. (original) The method of claim 1 further comprising querying at least one printing device to determine its availability.

9. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said ~~dividing, said distributing and said load balancing~~ determining comprises dividing said print task, when said print task comprises multiple copies of a print job, into sets of copies of said print job, each of said sets comprising a number of copies substantially proportional to the number of pages per minute (PPM) each of said specific printing devices ~~printer~~ can print.

10. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said ~~dividing, said distributing and said load balancing~~ determining comprises dividing said print task, when said print task comprises multiple and distinct print jobs, into sets of distinct print jobs, each of said sets comprising a number of pages substantially proportional to the number of pages per minute (PPM) each of said specific printing devices ~~printer~~ can print.

11. (previously presented) A method for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said method comprising:

receiving a print task at a print system component;

receiving user input comprising a cluster printing selection at said print system component, wherein said selection identifies specific printing devices and communicates a specific quantity of printing devices;

combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

creating spool data from said driver-dependent data;

determining portions of said spool data to be distributed to each of said specific printing devices; and

determining the output capacity of ~~multiple~~ said specific printing devices; and

despooling said spool data in accordance with said cluster printing selection wherein said despooling comprises distribution of said print task to said ~~multiple~~ specific printing devices in substantial proportion to each of said ~~multiple~~ specific printing device's output capacity and wherein said despooling further comprises concurrent parallel playback of spool data to ~~multiple~~ printer drivers corresponding to each of said specific printing devices.

12. (currently amended) The method of claim 11 wherein said determining the output capacity comprises querying a local printer through a system bus.

13. (currently amended) The method of claim 11 wherein said determining the output capacity comprises querying a network printer using a network communications protocol.

14. (currently amended) The method of claim 11 wherein said determining the output capacity comprises querying a printer driver.

15. (currently amended) The method of claim 11 wherein said determining the output capacity comprises accessing a printer attribute registry.

16. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein said print system component comprises a print processor.

17. (currently amended) The method of claim 11 wherein said determining the output capacity comprises estimating the capability of some of said multiple printing devices.

18. (currently amended) A method for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said method comprising:

receiving a print task at a print system component;

receiving user input comprising a cluster printing selection at said print system component, wherein said selection identifies specific printing devices and communicates a specific quantity of printing devices;

combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

creating spool data from said driver-dependent data;

modifying said spool data according to said cluster printing selection;

determining the output capacity of multiple printing devices comprising said specific printing devices; and

despooling said spool data in accordance with said cluster printing selection wherein said despooling comprises distribution of said print task to said ~~multiple~~ specific printing devices in substantial proportion to each of said ~~multiple~~ specific printing device's output capacity and wherein said despooling further comprises concurrent parallel playback of spool data to multiple printer drivers.

19. (previously presented) The method of claim 18 wherein said output capacity comprises a printer's speed in PPM.

20. (previously presented) The method of claim 18 wherein a determination of said output capacity comprises a determination of a printing device's disk storage capacity.

21. (previously presented) The method of claim 18 wherein a determination of said output capacity comprises an analysis of a printing device's rasterization pipeline.

22. (previously presented) The method of claim 18 wherein a determination of said output capacity comprises an evaluation of alternative rasterization methods and a selection of the fastest method for a specific print task.

23. (currently amended) A printing system for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said system comprising:

a print task receiver for receiving a print task;

a cluster selection receiver for receiving a cluster printing selection comprising an identification of specific printing devices and a quantity of specific printing devices;

a combiner for combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

a transmitter for transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

a driver for creating spool data from said driver-dependent data;

a modifier for modifying said spool data according to said cluster printing selection;

a capacity determiner for determining the output capacity of multiple printing devices comprising said specific printing devices; ~~and~~

a portioner for determining portions of said spool data to be distributed to each of said specific printing devices; and

a despooler for despooling said spool data portions in accordance with said cluster printing selection wherein said despooling comprises distribution of said ~~print task~~ spool data portions to said ~~multiple~~ specific printing devices in substantial proportion to each of said ~~multiple~~ specific printing device's output capacity and wherein said despooling further comprises concurrent parallel playback of spool data to multiple printer drivers.

24. (previously presented) A computer-readable medium comprising instructions for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said instructions comprising the acts of:

receiving a print task at a print system component;

receiving user input comprising a cluster printing selection at said print system component, wherein said selection identifies specific printing devices and a quantity of specific printing devices;

combining said print task with said cluster printing selection thereby creating driver-dependent data;

transmitting said driver-dependent data to a printer driver;

creating spool data from said driver-dependent data;

modifying said spool data according to said cluster printing selection;

determining the output capacity of multiple printing devices comprising said specific printing devices; ~~and~~

determining portions of said spool data to be distributed to each of said specific printing devices; and

despooling said spool data in accordance with said cluster printing selection wherein said despooling comprises distribution of said ~~print task~~ spool data portions to said ~~multiple~~ specific printing devices in substantial proportion to each of said ~~multiple~~ specific printing device's output capacity and wherein said despooling further comprises concurrent parallel playback of spool data to multiple printer drivers.

25. (canceled)